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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 002500

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY: WEEKEND AMBUSH BRINGS TEMPERATURE TO
BOILING POINT ON PKK

REF: A. ANKARA 2441

[1](#)B. ANKARA 2440

Classified By: DCM Nancy McEldowney, reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: A PKK ambush October 7 killed 13 Turkish soldiers in southeastern Sirnak province, the biggest single loss the military has incurred in years and the latest in a string of terrorist incidents. A series of high level meetings, including a PM-President-CHOD meeting, and the counter-terrorism council chaired by the PM, are examining options. The GOT spokesman made clear that words no longer suffice. End summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) The October 7 PKK ambush which killed 13 Turkish soldiers in Sirnak province, which borders Iraq, has again riveted the nation's attention on the PKK. Major international news outlets are quoting a PKK spokesperson as claiming responsibility for the attack, but it does not yet appear on the PKK website.

[1](#)3. (SBU) After a relatively quiescent summer, attacks and bombings have spiked in the past 10 days. In addition to the October 7 ambush, these include:

--The September 29 attack on a minibus in Sirnak province which killed 12 civilians;

--Twin bombings in Izmir's Buca district on October 2, killing one and injuring 11;

--A bomb in a garbage can near a fast ferry terminal in Istanbul on October 8 that injured 4;

--The October 6 death of one soldier in eastern Van province when PKK terrorists opened fire on a military headquarters;

--The October 8 death of two soldiers in Diyarbakir province from an IED.

[1](#)4. (SBU) PM Erdogan, President Gul and TGS chief Buyukanit met October 8 for 75 minutes to discuss the situation. Afterwards they released a statement expressing support for the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) and focusing on their

determination to combat terrorism. A regularly scheduled GOT cabinet meeting took place the same day, dominated by the PKK. After the cabinet meeting, Deputy PM and GOT spokesman Cemil Cicek stated that the GOT was weighing all possible measures against the PKK, including the possibility of a cross-border operation (CBO) into neighboring northern Iraq. He stressed that the consequences of such a move should be considered. "What is at issue here," Cicek said, "is how much any action we decide to take would bring us closer to a result." The counter-terrorism board, chaired by PM Erdogan (these meetings would normally be chaired by Cicek), convened at 10 am local October 9.

¶5. (SBU) The army, which had in May announced the creation of three "temporary security zones" - limited areas which they essentially cordoned off to deter PKK movement - on October 7 announced the creation of 27 new such security zones in the southeast.

¶6. (SBU) The GOT cannot afford to be seen as inactive or weak on this national priority issue. PM Erdogan told the press, "We are going to evaluate the situation and take the necessary measures. The fight against terrorism will continue with some different measures." President Gul, the commander-in-chief of the TAF, condemned the killings and lionized the TAF, noting that the soldiers killed in the October 7 ambush were among those with whom he had broken bread during his September trip to the SE. All parties have condemned the killings, including the DTP, which for the first time used the term "martyrs" to refer to the dead soldiers.

¶7. (U) The massacre is the sole front page story in the

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newspapers, with pictures of the dead soldiers and their grieving widows and children. Commentators blamed a combination of the US (and, by association, the Iraqi Kurds); the GOT for its "weak" policies; and the DTP for its failure to denounce the PKK. The temperature in the media and in the general public will spike further with the wave of funerals that will take place around the country October 9 and 10.

¶8. (C) Comment: Turkey is the home of perfect storms. But not all such storms are coincidental. This surge in PKK violence seems carefully calculated and anything but accidental. It comes two weeks after the Turks and Iraqis concluded a counter-terrorism agreement (which nearly foundered over the issue of hot pursuit - an issue over which they agreed to disagree for now) and is designed to drive a wedge into that relationship. It comes as PM Erdogan and especially President Gul have used conciliatory, inclusive language with respect to Turkey's ethnic groups - the Kurds in particular - and have talked about reaching out to the Iraqi Kurds. These attacks are designed to prevent any such positive action from taking place. They seem aimed, too, at preventing the DTP's inclusion in parliament from bearing any positive fruit. Finally, coming on the eve of House Foreign Affairs Committee consideration of the Armenian genocide resolution, it adds even more fuel to the anti-Americanism fire here. The fact that the GOT and TGS are carefully weighing their options is a positive. However, GOT spokesman Cicek said very clearly after the October 8 cabinet meeting, "We have reached the point where words don't work anymore." While Erdogan said he would announce a new strategy after talking to President Bush, the Turks have reached the point where they will take action they deem necessary, whatever decision they feel they need to on their own.

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